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Cuba's Evolving Relations With Latin America

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An Intelligence Assessment

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*ALA 84-10092
September 1984*

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An Intelligence Assessment

This paper was prepared by [redacted]
Office of African and Latin American Analysis. It
was coordinated with the Directorate of
Operations. [redacted]

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**Cuba's Evolving Relations
With Latin America**

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Key Judgments

*Information available
as of 1 September 1984
was used in this report.*

Havana has traditionally followed a two-track policy in Latin America—pursuing both revolutionary goals and diplomatic gains—with its tactical emphasis determined by overall policy needs and the dictates of local situations. Over the last two years, Havana has largely been forced onto the defensive by the United States and has sought energetically to improve bilateral relations with much of Latin America. Castro is too ingrained a revolutionary ever to halt support for insurgencies, but during this period he has promoted destabilization with greater selectivity. On occasion—as in Colombia—evidence suggests he has moderated the extent of support for revolutionary tactics when it conflicted with diplomatic objectives.

Cuba's covert activities and growing military involvement in Central America¹ have been complemented over the last two years by a relatively more subtle and balanced strategy in the rest of Latin America. Cuba has boosted its stock as a diplomatic actor and achieved several breakthroughs in South America by:

- Capitalizing on the atmosphere of regional unity surrounding the 1982 Falklands war to improve diplomatic relations with Argentina and Bolivia.
- Establishing full diplomatic relations with Ecuador.
- Increasing participation in regional conferences to try to improve Cuba's image as a responsible member of the inter-American community and to facilitate bilateral contacts.
- Successfully instituting bilateral commercial, cultural, and political exchanges with most Latin American countries. Havana apparently hopes that these actions will lead to early normalization of relations with the Andean countries while laying the groundwork elsewhere for an eventual upgrading of ties.

Despite galling setbacks in Grenada and Suriname, policy reassessments in Havana apparently reconfirmed the need for a strong Cuban diplomatic effort. According to reports from the US Interests Section, Cuban leaders have perceived—particularly in the past year—the need to generate the widest possible diplomatic support. This is because they fear a looming confrontation with the United States over Central America, where Castro remains committed to supporting his allies.

¹ This paper does not examine Cuba's role in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Grenada.

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We believe that Cuba will make some additional diplomatic inroads in South America:

- Colombia is likely soon to allow a Cuban commercial office to open in Bogota as a possible prelude to diplomatic relations.
- Ongoing talks with Venezuela could lead to a normalization of relations.
- In Peru, upgraded relations are likely if the main left-leaning opposition party wins the April 1985 elections, as it is favored to do.
- Bolivia and Cuba would probably exchange ambassadors if President Siles can consolidate his political power, which is questionable at this point.

Overall, however, we doubt that Cuba's impact in the region over the next few years will be greatly enhanced. Cuba's near-term prospects for establishing diplomatic relations with other South American states are generally dim. We doubt Brasilia will accede to Havana's overtures in the face of opposition from military and conservative political groups. Havana is prepared to wait until "pariah" military regimes in Chile, Uruguay, and Paraguay are replaced before it seeks improved relations, according to public statements by Cuban officials.

Havana has strived to maintain its traditionally close ties with Mexico through frequent high-level exchanges between the governments and several new commercial agreements. Elsewhere in the Caribbean, Havana has not had much success in improving relations with English-speaking countries, where its influence was never very strong. The exposure of Cuban activities in Grenada last year and the forced withdrawal of Cuban personnel from Suriname effectively aborted whatever diplomatic progress Havana had made in the Caribbean up to that time. In recent months, Havana has been most active in Guyana, where it has increased the number of Cuban diplomatic personnel and civilian advisers in Georgetown to 81; in our view, the mutual distrust between Castro and Burnham is likely to limit cooperation despite Havana's desire to turn Guyana into a base of operations. In other areas, such as the Netherlands Antilles, Cuban approaches have centered on commercial opportunities, and the strategy seems to be a methodical, building-block approach.

In our judgment, Havana's campaign to improve bilateral relations in the hemisphere—as opposed to relying still more heavily or even exclusively on subversion—is a temporary tactic to strengthen its regional flanks in the face of the growing US challenge to Cuban interests in Central America and against Cuba itself. Castro's commitment to the revolution in Central America, nevertheless, remains strong, although it is tempered by concern over the response of the United States, [REDACTED]

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Cuba continues to train and provide guidance to guerrillas in Colombia, Chile, and probably Bolivia. We believe Castro would not pass up additional opportunities to foment trouble—if political agitation against the Pinochet regime in Chile unexpectedly reached major proportions, for example, and he judged that he could play a more direct role in subverting the government.

Return to a regional policy dominated by the promotion of subversion, in our view, would almost certainly increase Cuba's diplomatic isolation at the very time Castro desperately needs allies. We believe that the USSR, which, according to Embassy [] reporting, endorses Havana's campaign to improve ties with its neighbors, would try to restrain Castro out of concern for its own sizable diplomatic and commercial interests in such countries as Argentina and Brazil.

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Cuba's current mix of diplomacy and subversion in Latin America will continue to threaten US interests in the region. Havana's activities are resulting in a larger Cuban presence and in heightened Cuban influence with receptive governments, particularly in South America. This presence furthers Cuba's efforts to undermine US influence in the near term and places Cuba in a stronger position to exploit future periods of instability. In the event that Cuba returned in the next two years to a still more aggressive policy of promoting subversion at the cost of imperiling its diplomatic standing, the United States and moderate regimes could face more direct and immediate security challenges in such key states as Colombia, the Dominican Republic, or Ecuador. At a minimum, we believe we are certain to see a continuation of selective support for radical groups.

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Status of Cuban Relations Within Latin America



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Cuba's Evolving Relations With Latin America

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Introduction

Since early 1982, Cuba has successfully sustained a broad program to improve bilateral relations with numerous Latin American governments. To promote its plan, Havana has claimed an affinity of interests with sister nations and has emphasized its "moderation" and greater respectability on the international scene. Many observers believe this effort stems primarily from Cuba's desire to buttress its regional flanks as it faces stiff challenges to its activism in Central America and Africa and from constraints arising from a troubled economy and lukewarm popular support. Given Havana's strong commitment to revolutionaries in Central America and selective support of radical groups elsewhere—most of which is recognized by hemispheric governments—Cuba's progress to date testifies to its dogged effort. This paper will examine the gains Cuba has achieved and the prospects for further state-to-state or commercial breakthroughs that could strengthen Cuba's position in the hemisphere.

The Current Strategy and Goals

Havana's energetic drive to reestablish or upgrade diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties with as many Latin American countries as possible grew out of a reassessment of its foreign policy options that, according to the US Interests Section and Havana's public statements, Cuban leaders undertook in late 1981. Having suffered several international reverses—including defeat in its bid for a UN Security Council seat in 1979 and the embarrassing Mariel exodus in 1980—Havana decided to try to refurbish Cuba's international standing. According to the US Interests Section, the centerpiece of this effort was to be a campaign to improve relations with Latin America, pursued in tandem with a drive to strengthen Cuba's position in the Nonaligned Movement (NAM) and in other international settings, and with an intensified cultivation of West European governments.

Cuban policymakers saw new opportunities in the climate of Latin American solidarity helped along partly by the Falklands crisis, beginning in April 1982. According to the US Interests Section and [redacted] Havana expected that assertive approaches to key capitals, along with a propaganda barrage portraying Cuban solidarity with Latin America on the Falklands dispute, would produce early breakthroughs on the diplomatic front. Simultaneously, [redacted] Havana decided to pursue a longer term building-block approach; this was designed to cultivate influential sectors in specific countries and, where feasible, to facilitate dialogues on contentious bilateral issues impeding normalization of relations. The building-block push included:

- Issuing invitations to parliamentary delegations, political party groups, and government officials at all levels to visit Cuba.
- Pursuing commercial contracts to convey the notion that business dealings were possible even in the absence of political ties.
- Conducting a broad range of cultural, athletic, and other nonpolitical exchanges with hemispheric neighbors to demonstrate that Cuba belongs in the Latin American cultural mainstream.

Ultimately, according to the US Interests Section, this longer term approach was intended to improve Cuba's image as a responsible actor on the Latin American political scene and to build support for upgrading relations with such recalcitrants as Peru, Venezuela, Costa Rica, and several Caribbean countries. The effort also was designed to contrast with US charges that Cuba was a threat to hemispheric security.

Havana's motivation for persisting in its courtship of Latin America has intensified, according to the US Interests Section, as Cuban leaders saw an urgent need to shore up Havana's flanks in the face of a looming confrontation with the United States over

Central America. The reporting portrays Havana as expecting that a general upgrading of ties, at a minimum, would better enable Cuba to muster hemispherewide solidarity against any US military intervention in Central America or greater pressure against Cuba itself. [redacted]

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Restraining Elements

Weighing its policy options toward Latin America, Havana has been encumbered by several constraints that have tended to restrain Cuban adventurism in South America and even in the Caribbean. Primary among these, [redacted]

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[redacted] is the fear that Washington will follow up on charges that Havana is destabilizing Latin American governments with a direct attack against Cuba. A number of other factors that reinforce restraint, according to the US Interests Section [redacted]

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- The need to appear moderate, responsible, and prepared to compromise regarding Central America.
- The high priority Havana attaches to drawing closer to West European governments, particularly such Socialist ones as France, Spain, and Sweden.
- The necessity of negotiating responsibly in rescheduling a part of Cuba's \$3.2 billion hard currency debt, most of it owed to Japan, Spain, and France.
- The effects of continuing economic troubles at home—low productivity, lagging exports, and consumer goods shortages—and the lukewarm public support for some aspects of Cuban foreign policy, notably the maintenance of troops in southern Africa.
- Concern that, despite increased Cuban involvement in Angola, the time may be approaching when Cuban troops will have to be withdrawn, thereby heightening Havana's anxiety over the appearance of another major foreign policy setback. [redacted]

Adjusting to the Grenada Setback

Despite Havana's multifaceted program to cultivate its hemispheric neighbors, by late 1983 Cuba's foreign policy fortunes had plunged anew. According to the US Interests Section, setbacks in Central America and Grenada prompted Cuban leaders to yet another reevaluation of their options in Latin America. Cuba faced two major problems in Central America and the Caribbean. First, Castro was forced onto the defensive by the rising challenge to his allies in Central America, which carried the risks that the durability of the Salvadoran insurgency might eventually trigger direct US military intervention and that the Sandinistas might be forced from power. [redacted]

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[redacted] Castro viewed the deteriorating Central American situation as directly threatening Cuba's vital interests. [redacted]

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[redacted] Havana was caught offguard by the fall of the pro-Cuban Bishop regime in Grenada. This overturned one of Castro's basic ideological principles, namely the irreversibility of a revolutionary movement once it achieves power. The US intervention in Grenada in October 1983, followed by the ouster of Cuban personnel from Suriname and the ensuing condemnation of Cuba by most Caribbean governments, compounded Havana's frustration. [redacted]

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Cuban leaders evidently decided that a vengeful reversion to an aggressive foreign policy ran the risk of sharp retaliation from the United States. According to the US Interests Section, by January 1984 Cuba's leaders completed their post-Grenada policy review and decided to pursue more vigorously the

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drive to improve bilateral ties, concentrating on South America for the time being at least. In the Caribbean, a low-profile drawn-out effort to regain influence was judged by Cuban leaders to be the only logical alternative for now. [redacted]

[redacted] Castro is determined to rebuild Cuban prestige and evidently realizes that continued cultivation of as many hemispheric neighbors as possible is the most practical approach as long as the fate of Cuba's Central American allies hangs in the balance. [redacted]

The Record

By mid-1982, Havana's drive to improve relations with much of Latin America was in full swing, with the earliest gains achieved in South America. Building-block activities were pursued throughout the Caribbean and even in Costa Rica and Belize. Bilateral efforts were complemented by concerted multilateral activities, as Havana successfully courted Latin American support through the NAM, regional organizations, and international gatherings held in Latin America. Continuing efforts to improve Cuban relations with Western Europe also were intended in part to enhance Cuba's image in Latin America, according to US Interests Section reports. [redacted]

South America: Achieving Some Momentum

The Falklands crisis was especially fortuitous from Havana's standpoint. The Latin American political climate became more conducive for Cuba's plans in the region. The Castro government, after some early ambivalence because of its longtime aversion to the Argentine military, quickly endorsed the Argentine cause and moved rapidly to improve strained relations. It also acted opportunistically to associate Cuba in various forums with the pro-Argentine emotional groundswell that swept Latin America for several months. [redacted]

Castro likewise looked upon the crisis as a "golden opportunity" to strike a blow at Washington by reducing its influence in Latin America and perhaps even destroying the Organization of American States (OAS), which the Cuban leader termed the US "Ministry of Colonies." [redacted]



Cuban Vice President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez meeting with Argentine President Raul Alfonsin.

Clarín ©

Although Havana's hatred of the Argentine military and Buenos Aires's memory of Cuban links to the Montoneros made both parties wary of an overly close association, they have sustained the momentum of their relationship since the Falklands crisis by concentrating on economic matters. Thus, they have negotiated several major economic cooperation and trade agreements. Havana also quickly applauded the victory of Raul Alfonsin in the October 1983 Argentine national elections and sent Vice President Rodriguez to head a large delegation to the presidential inauguration in December. According to US Interests Section reports, the Cubans were not about to lose the chance to display solidarity with Latin America's general euphoria over the advent of democratic government in one of the region's major states. [redacted]

Beyond the general improvement in Cuba's standing facilitated by the Falklands crisis, governmental changes in Bolivia and Colombia aided Havana. New populist presidents came to office in both countries during 1982, promising to follow more autonomous foreign policies. Havana's first opening came when the left-leaning Hernan Siles Zuazo became President of Bolivia in October and invited Castro to send a delegation to his inauguration. Thereafter, the two governments moved steadily toward a resumption of diplomatic ties—broken by La Paz in 1964—and this was formalized in January 1983 at the charge level.

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Cuban Vice President Carlos Rafael Rodriguez meeting with Ecuadorean President Osvaldo Hurtado. [redacted]

Bohemia ©

Similarly, the inauguration of President Betancur in Colombia, in August 1982, led to several months of bilateral soundings and Bogota's public statement that it was disposed to revive diplomatic ties with Havana which had been suspended since 1981. The Colombian Foreign Minister cautioned publicly, however, that both capitals wanted to move deliberately. Reflecting this approach, Bogota and Havana expanded political and cultural contacts, and the two presidents soon developed a cordial relationship and consulted regularly on regional issues, according to Embassy reports. [redacted]

Cuban contacts with other South American countries—Ecuador, Peru, and Venezuela—were also extensive, including a marked increase in high-level visitors, trade consultations, and numerous cultural events. This contributed to Havana's overly optimistic hope in early 1983 that relations with these countries and Colombia would be upgraded in succession. [redacted]

[redacted] Havana also apparently believed that once this occurred, other hold-outs—even in the Caribbean and Central America—would become more receptive to Cuban approaches. [redacted]

Nevertheless, officials in several South American countries remained dubious about Cuba's motives. According to Embassy [redacted] reporting, Venezuelan, Ecuadorean, and Peruvian officials were irritated that Havana still refused to compromise on bilateral disputes—such as diplomatic asylum issues related to the 1980 Mariel exodus—that had soured bilateral relations in the first place. In Venezuela's

case, there was the added dispute over Caracas's stalled judicial decision on Orlando Bosch, an accused perpetrator of the 1976 bombing of a Cubana airliner that killed all aboard. Even President Betancur, according to Embassy reports, feared that should he move quickly to restore ties with Havana, he would face domestic political repercussions, due to Cuba's record of support for the M-19 guerrillas. The Cubans experienced similar setbacks in Brazil and some Caribbean countries—in Brasilia's case, because of the military's longtime animosity, and in that of several Caribbean countries, because of anxiety regarding Havana's regional subversive proclivities. [redacted]

To help overcome the obstacles, Cuban leaders shifted to the longer term building-block approach, and, throughout 1983 placed less emphasis on governmental contacts, while also continuing low key dialogues on contentious bilateral disputes. Moreover, where feasible, Havana intensified dealings with nonradical leftist political groups—such as in Peru, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Colombia. [redacted]

[redacted] Cuba was seeking thereby to generate additional support—and, in some cases, pressure—for eventual establishment, or improvement, of bilateral relations. Electoral developments, showing the considerable influence of the leftist groups in the first three countries at least, were encouraging to Havana in this context, according to Embassy [redacted] reporting. [redacted]

Cuba's revitalized drive since the Grenada debacle has paid dividends, according to the US Interests Section. In addition to Cuban attendance at the Alfonsin inauguration last December, Havana sent high-level delegations to the Latin American Economic Conference in Quito in January and the Lusinchi inauguration in Caracas in February and has stepped up exchanges with Latin American officials in general. Further, the Ecuadorean President announced in January he would restore relations with Havana to the ambassadorial level. According to Embassy reporting [redacted]

[redacted] Cuban leaders recently also have made headway in assuring some high-ranking South American officials—in Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, and even Venezuela—of Cuba's greater "moderation" regarding the Central American situation. [redacted]

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The Caribbean Basin: A Harder Road

In the Caribbean Basin, Cuba has faced greater obstacles and met with less success than in South America. For instance, Cuban influence in the English-speaking Caribbean—never strong—reached a low point by late 1981 following the rupture in diplomatic relations with Jamaica. Apart from the Sandinista and Bishop regimes, Cuba at that time maintained normal ties only with Panama. Anti-Cuban attitudes prevailed throughout much of the Basin. [redacted]

To help reverse this trend, a Cuban diplomatic mission in late 1981 toured the English-speaking Caribbean islands, seeking to improve Cuba's image. Havana followed up this initiative with a diversified program to develop commercial opportunities, expand airlinks, and promote increased cultural and education exchanges. Havana demonstrated considerable persistence and flexibility in this effort. [redacted]

[redacted] it was intent on offsetting—to the extent possible—criticism of its growing involvement in Grenada and on undermining the US-sponsored Caribbean Basin Initiative. Similar but lower key activities were directed at the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, although, according to US Interests Section reports, Cuban leaders evidently realized there was little prospect for improving relations with them any time soon. [redacted]

Despite these efforts, the Cubans had only limited success. They achieved a moderate expansion of diplomatic contacts throughout the region, leading in the case of Barbados to an upgrading of ties in early 1983, and increased collaboration with several Caribbean governments in the NAM. Some governments also were willing to consider scholarships for their nationals to study in Cuba and responded to Cuban commercial promotion efforts by agreeing to a few minor trade deals and limited expansion of airlinks. According to Embassy reporting, the attitude of most countries, however, was conditioned by growing concern

over Cuba's ever-closer association with the Bishop regime and anxiety over the rapid expansion of Cuban influence in Suriname beginning in late 1982. In addition, moderate, anti-Cuban political leaders were elected in several countries during 1981-82. The October 1983 events in Grenada triggered Suriname's request for the withdrawal of most Cuban personnel from that country and produced a strong regional condemnation of Cuba. This effectively aborted whatever progress Havana had achieved until then. [redacted]

In recent months, Havana has limited its contacts in the region almost exclusively to Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago, which opposed the Grenada intervention. The number of Cuban personnel in Georgetown has increased from about 70 to a total of 81—including 11 in the Embassy and the remainder as civilian advisers—and cultural and economic exchanges have expanded. [redacted] We have no evidence that the long-lasting mutual suspicion between Castro and Guyana's President Burnham has lessened appreciably, however.² Havana has made several overtures to Trinidad and Tobago to expand commercial ties and to obtain agreement to open a long-desired embassy in Port-of-Spain. The US Embassy there reports that local officials seem receptive to increasing trade with Cuba but are unwilling to upgrade diplomatic relations. [redacted]

[redacted] Cuba expects few opportunities to improve its tenuous ties with other Caribbean Basin countries in the near future. Nevertheless, Havana persists in its long-term building-block efforts in the region. [redacted]

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Playing Down Operational Activities

Despite Cuba's energetic pursuit of closer bilateral relations with much of Latin America, Havana—regardless of tactical shifts—almost certainly will not deviate from its goal of spreading “revolutionary struggle” throughout Latin America. For now at least, Cuba has largely restricted its operational activities to Central America. Elsewhere, in our view, Cuba is in a holding pattern, seeking to retain its revolutionary credentials by providing minimal assistance and guidance to insurgent groups but not enough to jeopardize its diplomatic campaign.

circumstantial evidence suggests that the Cuban President threw his weight behind the moderates who argued for reducing support to the Colombian guerrillas and promoting an early resumption of bilateral relations. Several months ago, Castro was also instrumental in obtaining the release of Betancur's brother, kidnapped by guerrillas, according to Embassy reports.

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The Cubans are continuing to provide at least minimal levels of support and guidance to Latin American insurgent groups in various other countries.

Cuba has continued to train Chilean insurgents in recent years. Castro has reevaluated this activity because of his concern over adverse reactions by Argentine President Alfonsín, who favors Chile's moderate opposition political parties and condemns the extreme left. In the Dominican Republic, the vigilance of successive anti-Cuban governments has forestalled Cuban meddling until recently,

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With regard to Bolivia, Cuban planners differed over what approach to take from the outset of renewed relations in January 1983,

Some officials, led by Vice President Rodriguez, advocated low-profile, longer range efforts to collaborate with the new Siles government, while others, led by the head of the America Department of the Cuban Communist Party, pressed for a “revolutionary policy,”

Havana recently opted for Rodriguez's approach and now seeks to avoid actions that could benefit Siles's opponents, although Cuba continues to maintain contacts with radical leftists in Bolivia, probably through limited training and funding.

the riots in the Dominican Republic in April 1984 evidently led Havana to conclude that political instability there will persist and that Cuba's long aspiration to unify the disparate Dominican left might finally be realized.

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Mexico: A Separate Case

Cuba's relations with Mexico are unique in Latin America. Mexico has been the only Latin American country never to sever relations with Cuba, and Havana has looked to successive Mexican presidents for understanding and active support, where feasible, in Cuba's strained relations with Washington. Mexico, in turn, has nurtured its relations with Havana partly to underscore its foreign policy independence, especially with regard to Washington,

Over the past two years, Havana has devoted special attention to its traditionally close relations with Mexico. High-level exchanges between the two capitals have become more frequent during the past six months, and several new commercial and other cooperative accords have been signed. We believe that Havana decided to push for these expanded contacts in part because of Castro's reported concern that Mexico's economic woes might prompt the de la Madrid administration to seek closer relations with Washington.

We believe Mexico's role in the Contadora process—which Havana sees as strongly supportive of Nicaragua—and with regard to Central American developments in general have eased Castro's concern that the de la Madrid government might draw closer to Washington.

Castro's personal ties with de la Madrid are not as warm as those with the Mexican President's two immediate predecessors; the highest ranking Cuban to have direct contact with senior Mexicans during the past two years has been Vice President Rodriguez, according to available evidence.

Despite the value Havana places on this unique relationship, however, Cuban leaders do not appear to regard it as directly related to their efforts to cultivate better ties elsewhere in Latin America. We have no indication that Cuban officials have attempted to portray ties with Mexico as a model for relations with other countries or to utilize the Mexicans as intermediaries with other Latin American capitals, at least during the past two years. We believe Havana realizes that such efforts would provoke adverse reactions, especially among South American governments, most of which have never had close associations with Mexico City.

Multilateral Diplomacy:**Complementing Latin American Policies**

Havana's efforts to bolster its position in the NAM, to cultivate better relations with Western Europe, and to promote other aspects of its multilateral diplomacy were intended partly to supplement its improving relations with Latin American governments, according to the US Interests Section. During late 1982 and early 1983, for example, Havana succeeded in its persistent effort to encourage greater Latin American membership in the NAM. It hoped, thereby, according to the same source, to promote a regional bloc

responsive to prolonging its leadership in the movement. Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Barbados, The Bahamas, and Antigua and Barbuda—each for its own purposes—applied for NAM status. From Havana's perspective, by the time Castro stepped down as chairman of the NAM in March 1983, only a few key Latin American governments—notably Brazil and Mexico—appeared uninterested in joining.

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In addition, high-level Cuban participation in international conferences held throughout Latin America—but most often in South America—has become an increasingly important channel for Havana. The Cubans have shown keenest interest in economic meetings, where they carefully portray their involvement as evidence of Havana's readiness to help overcome Latin America's socioeconomic disparities. Cuban spokesmen also occasionally intimate their willingness to reintegrate Cuba into those parts of the inter-American system that in Havana's view are not "controlled" by Washington, as Havana depicts the OAS. In contrast to its NAM tactics, Havana has assumed a low profile in conference sessions and has been circumspect in its efforts to manipulate such organizations as the Latin American Economic System (SELA) and the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA), which [redacted] Cuba views as free of US influence. [redacted]

We believe Havana sees several advantages, and few risks, flowing from the increased visibility and direct access to many top Latin American figures afforded by the meetings. They provide an opportunity to deepen Havana's "solidarity" with Latin America in opposition to the United States. Moreover, attendance at some meetings enables Cuban officials to visit countries with which relations are strained or nonexistent, such as Brazil, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay. Finally, most of the conferences have been ideal for exploring informally the removal of obstacles to improving ties. [redacted]

Since 1982, Havana also has stepped up its participation in regional cultural activities. To commemorate the bicentennial of Simon Bolivar's birth, Cuban representatives in 1983 attended several events in Colombia, Venezuela, and elsewhere. Local officials responded positively, and media coverage of these activities pointed to Cuban participation as evidence of Havana's serious desire to rejoin the inter-American system. [redacted]

In addition, according to the US Interests Section [redacted] since late 1983 Havana has intensified significantly its cultivation of virtually all West European governments. In our view, Cuban leaders probably believe such efforts in Western Europe help overcome recent blows to Cuba's international image, may help divide Washington from its

European allies on such issues as the Central American crisis and the US-Cuban estrangement, and complement Havana's program to improve bilateral relations in Latin America. [redacted]

The Soviet Connection

Although we believe Havana's two-year drive to improve relations with its hemispheric neighbors almost certainly is not in direct response to pressures or guidance from Moscow, the two countries have long shared—and cooperated to achieve—several basic objectives in Latin America. The foremost is a mutual desire to undermine the US position in the hemisphere. The Soviet Union apparently is motivated in this regard primarily by strategic and global concerns. Embassy [redacted] suggests that Moscow calculates that continuing instability in the region will divert US attention and resources—including military forces—from more distant problem areas and weaken Washington's credibility in the eyes of its hemispheric neighbors and the Third World in general. [redacted]

Moscow and Havana also are in basic ideological agreement on the need to support leftist causes throughout the hemisphere. Thus, even though at times they have espoused different tactics, they both hope that as a result of their support revolutionary regimes eventually will gain power. Their expectations over prospects in this context have waxed and waned for decades. [redacted]

[redacted] Moscow and Havana welcomed the coming to power of the Sandinista and Bishop regimes in 1979 and subsequent consolidation of Bouterse's rule in Suriname as likely preludes to a succession of similarly oriented regimes in Latin America. There is considerable evidence that they, therefore, acted in unison to expand military and security links to Nicaragua, strengthen their ties to Grenada, and co-opt Suriname. The Soviet Union, however, moved more cautiously than did Cuba in developing political relations with these regimes—apparently because it feared an adverse US reaction. [redacted]

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Panorama of Cuban Relations With Latin America, 1970 to June 1984

	Key Dates	Current Status
South America		
Argentina	Relations restored in 1973.	Embassies headed by ambassadors operate in both capitals.
Bolivia	Relations restored in January 1983.	Cuban Embassy, headed by charge, operates in La Paz; there is no Bolivian Embassy in Havana.
Brazil	No relations.	
Chile	Relations broken following Allende's ouster in 1973; not resumed.	
Colombia	Relations restored in 1975; suspended by Bogota in 1981.	
Ecuador	Relations restored in 1979; downgraded to charge level in 1981; upgraded to ambassadorial level, January 1984.	Embassies headed by ambassadors operate in both capitals.
Paraguay	No relations.	
Peru	Relations restored in 1972; downgraded to charge level in 1980.	Embassies headed by charges operate in both capitals, although the Peruvian Mission in Havana has only a skeleton staff.
Uruguay	No relations.	
Venezuela	Relations restored in 1975; Caracas downgraded its Embassy in Havana in mid-1980; Havana closed its Embassy in Caracas in September 1980 but did not sever relations.	Venezuelan Embassy, headed by a charge, operates in Havana; although Cuban Embassy in Caracas remains closed, two Cuban diplomats unofficially handle Cuban interests there.
Middle America		
Mexico	Only Latin American country never to sever relations with Castro regime.	Embassies headed by ambassadors operate in both capitals; the Cuban Embassy in Mexico City, with 79 officials, is the largest Cuban diplomatic mission in Latin America and one of the largest worldwide; in addition, there is a Cuban Consulate in Merida.
Guatemala	No relations.	
Belize	No relations.	
El Salvador	No relations.	
Honduras	No relations.	
Costa Rica	Consular and economic relations restored in February 1979; severed by San Jose in May 1981; no relations at present.	
Nicaragua	Relations restored upon Sandinista victory in July 1979.	Embassies headed by ambassadors operate in both capitals.
Panama	Relations restored in 1974.	Embassies headed by ambassadors operate in both capitals.
Caribbean		
Antigua and Barbuda	No relations.	
The Bahamas	Relations established soon after Bahamian independence in 1973, but only at nonresident level.	Cuban Ambassador to UN accredited to The Bahamas, but first presented credentials in 1979; Bahamian Ambassador to UN is accredited to Havana but apparently has never presented credentials there.

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Panorama of Cuban Relations With Latin America, 1970 to June 1984 (continued)

	Key Dates	Current Status
Barbados	Relations established in 1973 but at nonresident level; minimal diplomatic contact for a decade.	Cuban Ambassador in Guyana accredited to Bridgetown; Barbadian Ambassador to UN accredited to Havana, presented credentials, January 1983.
Dominica	Relations established by 1980, but only at nonresident level.	The then Cuban Ambassador to Grenada was accredited to Dominica as of November 1980; relations inactive by early 1983, probably discontinued.
Dominican Republic	No relations.	
Grenada	Relations established following Bishop coup, April 1979.	Embassies headed by ambassadors operated in both capitals until the joint Grenada operation in October 1983; currently relations essentially inactive but not broken; British Embassy in Havana represents Grenadian interests.
Guyana	Relations established in 1972.	Embassies headed by ambassadors operate in both capitals.
Haiti	No relations.	
Jamaica	Relations established in 1972; severed by Jamaica in 1981.	
St. Lucia	Relations established in 1979, but only at nonresident level.	The then Cuban Ambassador to Grenada was accredited to St. Lucia until November 1983; present designee unknown.
St. Christopher and Nevis	No relations.	
St. Vincent and the Grenadines	No relations.	
Suriname	Relations established in 1979 at nonresident level; Cuban Embassy in Paramaribo opened in June 1981.	Cuban Embassy headed by ambassador operated in Paramaribo until November 1983; when Bouterse ordered drastic reduction in Cuban staff, Havana withdrew all personnel and closed its Embassy; relations now inactive but not broken; Suriname has yet to open an Embassy in Havana.
Trinidad and Tobago	Relations established in 1972 but only at nonresident level.	Cuban Ambassador in Guyana accredited to Port-of-Spain in October 1980; new Trinidadian Ambassador presented credentials in Havana, July 1983.

Despite these areas of mutual agreement, there have been numerous instances since Moscow and Havana first established their partnership in 1961 when they have diverged over policy toward Latin America. Moscow publicly made it clear that it was more interested in fostering relations with governments themselves and in developing trade, and that it was highly skeptical of the "armed struggle" tactics espoused by the Cubans throughout the 1960s. Pressure from Moscow—including the use of economic leverage—was one of the principal factors in Castro's

decision to forgo his rogue elephant approach to "armed struggle" by the end of the decade. This was one of the watershed developments in the evolving Soviet-Cuban relationship that still conditions Cuban decisionmaking.

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The two capitals continued to differ on important occasions regarding tactics and objectives in Latin America, most notably toward the Allende government in Chile in the early 1970s, [] they may have even backed rival factions within the Bishop regime in Grenada. On balance, however, since the mid-1970s Moscow generally has deferred to Havana in identifying and providing advice and support to Latin American revolutionary groups, as well as in setting guidelines over when and where "armed struggle" tactics should be pursued.³ []

Cuban leaders in turn, [] over the past few years have usually been careful not to work at cross-purposes with Moscow at least with respect to several South American countries. Havana realizes, for example, that Moscow greatly values its sizable trade and basically cordial relations with Argentina and Brazil, as well as its unique arms relationship with Peru. Moreover, Moscow apparently believes that conditions in South America still are not propitious for pro-Soviet Communist parties and their allies to promote "armed struggle." Moscow's attitude, the lessons of the 1960s, and Cuba's deepening economic dependence on the Soviets undoubtedly reinforce Havana's decision to use a pragmatic diplomatic track, particularly in South America. []

Outlook

We believe that Havana will persist in trying to improve bilateral relations with as many Latin American governments as possible, particularly in South America, over the short run at least, and that Castro is encouraged by gains to date. With a lack of good opportunities for armed struggle in South America, Havana probably realizes that until the issue of Central America is settled, it is also wiser—for tactical reasons—to emphasize the diplomatic approach and, by doing so, increase the chances of winning support for the Cuban positions on Nicaragua and El Salvador. []

³ Havana has long had a low regard for several old-line Communist party leaders in Latin America who have continued to enjoy Moscow's favor. Cuban support for a number of radical leftists also has caused friction with the Soviets for years. At times, these differences have become public knowledge, causing some embarrassment in both capitals and, more important, undermining efforts to unify leftist forces in several Latin American countries. []

We strongly doubt, however, that Castro assigns such priority to the campaign to improve bilateral relations that he will slacken his support for the Sandinistas and the Salvadoran insurgents or his efforts to foment guerrilla activity in Honduras and Guatemala. Nor, in our view, will he cease his support to sustain radical groups in the Caribbean and South America such as the Dominican Republic's United Leftist Front and Colombia's M-19. Rather, he will play down such aid and probably be somewhat more selective in carrying out his basic commitment to "revolutionary struggle."

Cuba is likely to continue trying to sway the South Americans and others, such as the West Europeans, with its pose of moderation in pursuing a negotiated solution in Central America while playing down the extent of its involvement there. In our view, Cuban leaders expect their clamor regarding the "inevitability" of US military intervention in Central America or even against Cuba to have an impact with South American leaders. At a minimum, it aids their campaign to position Cuba in the mainstream of Latin American "solidarity." []

We judge that Castro—in the absence of new setbacks—may rationalize that continuing the bilateral relations approach indefinitely does not damage Cuba's revolutionary credentials beyond the costs already incurred by the loss of Grenada. Thus, Cuba gains "legitimacy" through striving to improve relations with its hemispheric neighbors while it continues to "defend and sponsor" the revolutionary process in Central America. Its current tactic also does not require major new commitments of resources that could detract from Havana's priority to defend Cuba's position and that of its allies in Central America. []

We believe that the general perception in much of Latin America that Cuba is being stalemated in Central America—a perception strengthened by events in Grenada and Suriname—has the effect of leading some governments, particularly in the Andean countries, to be more responsive to Havana's overtures for upgraded ties. Thus, judging by public and private

statements, some responsible South American commentators seem convinced that Havana is now less dangerous as a diplomatic interlocutor than in the past because its clipped wings and burdensome commitments in Central America and Africa will influence Havana to "behave." Moreover, as part of a trend toward espousing more autonomous foreign policies, several governments profess to want "normal" diplomatic relations with as many countries as possible; for instance, Ecuador's President stressed this point to the US Ambassador in upholding his decision early this year to exchange ambassadors with Cuba. In all cases, however, even South American governments contemplating closer contact with Havana, in our view, almost certainly remain suspicious of Castro's intentions toward them and most continue to deplore Cuba's actions in Central America. According to Embassy reports, however, some—even a few in the Caribbean Basin—apparently calculate that, unless they maintain a dialogue with Havana on how to improve relations, Castro might be tempted to try to destabilize their governments. They also see flirtation with Havana as useful for domestic political purposes, in outmaneuvering or attracting support from the left. []

Quickest Gains in South America

Assuming that Castro continues to adhere to the course suggested by his actions to date, we believe a growing receptivity by several South American governments to Cuban overtures could enable Havana to achieve several gains in the next two years. The most likely prospect is Colombia, which US Embassy [] suggests probably will permit Cuba to open a commercial office in Bogota within the next few months. The reaction of the military and conservative political interests to such a Cuban operation would determine when—or whether—President Betancur, who aspires to follow a more autonomous foreign policy, would be able to exercise his inclination toward the resumption of full diplomatic relations. A definitive truce with the M-19, which Havana favors, could strengthen Betancur's hand in this regard. []

[] Peru, Venezuela, and perhaps Bolivia all offer possibilities for an upgrading of relations to the ambassadorial level within the next two years but also present knotty problems. With Peru the problem turns partly on the

asylees who have been in Lima's Embassy in Havana since the 1980 Mariel episode, []

[] a compromise recently was quietly negotiated allowing half of them to depart. Nevertheless, neither President Belaunde nor his Prime Minister are ideologically inclined toward substantially better relations with Havana. Consequently, no new initiatives are likely until after the April 1985 elections, which the major left-leaning Peruvian opposition party now is favored to win. Several of its leaders openly support upgrading ties with Havana. []

Cuba also recently settled its asylees dispute with Caracas, and the two capitals are moving carefully toward warmer relations, []

[] Castro, however, wants punishment meted out to Orlando Bosch for the 1976 Cuban airliner bombing. We do not know whether Castro will be satisfied with the much-publicized recent request of Venezuelan prosecutors asking for maximum terms for Bosch and his confederates. In Bolivia, the Siles Zuazo administration is ideologically inclined to exchange ambassadors, but hesitates mainly for fear of offending the military, conservative political sectors, and Washington. Siles's tenure is uncertain and, if he were overthrown by the military, relations with Cuba probably would be curbed anew. []

Brazil is the only other South American country where Havana—mistakenly, in our view—may expect to achieve a breakthrough. Last year, Havana made several tentative overtures, and Castro may be encouraged by the pro-Cuban statements of some Brazilian officials. He may believe that the election of a civilian president in early 1985 will make Brasilia more receptive, especially if Havana's relations with one or more other South American countries improve. We believe, however, that a new civilian government in Brasilia is unlikely to offend so gratuitously the Brazilian military at least during its first year in office. This important void in Cuba's diplomatic presence in South America probably will increasingly irritate Castro because it will continue to frustrate his drive to regain "legitimacy" in Latin America. []

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Cuban President Fidel Castro with a delegation of Brazilian parliamentarians. [redacted]

Bohemia ©

Elsewhere in South America, Havana almost certainly will not make any overtures for formal relations with Chile, Paraguay, and Uruguay unless their rightwing military regimes are replaced. Judging by Cuban media treatment and some limited official contacts, Havana apparently expects that Uruguay—scheduled to return to civilian government in 1985—will be the first of the three to undergo political liberalization sufficient to justify a change in approach. Meanwhile, Castro may prefer the propaganda benefits of proclaiming that Havana has no interest in relations with these “pariah” regimes. [redacted]

Slow Going Elsewhere

We—and Cuban leaders, [redacted]

[redacted]—expect no other Latin American governments, apart from Colombia, Venezuela, Peru, and Bolivia, to respond to Cuban overtures for normalizing relations in the near term. A change of regime in Suriname or a renewed tilt toward Cuba by Army Commander Bouterse could result in a reopening of the Cuban Embassy in Paramaribo. We have no indication, however, that Havana expects a turnaround in relations with Suriname any time soon even though recent reporting suggests Bouterse has sent messages to Castro admitting his “mistake” in ousting Cuban personnel last fall and urging improved ties. [redacted]

[redacted] Cuban officials are uncertain whether they can retain even tenuous ties with governments of the English-speaking Caribbean states following the Grenada debacle. Whereas Havana will continue to monitor events in Grenada—particularly looking for ways to strengthen the successor to Bishop's New Jewel Movement—we judge that Cuban officials are pessimistic over prospects for any meaningful Cuban role in Grenada, at least in the near term. In the case of Jamaica and some of the smaller islands, Havana evidently calculates it will have to await new governments before it can initiate steps to renew or establish ties, judging by US Interests Section reports. For its part, Trinidad and Tobago, based on statements by Trinidadian officials, probably will insist on keeping relations at the nonresident level but may respond to recent Cuban proposals to expand trade. [redacted]

Havana is paying greater attention to Guyana, and, considering Cuba's setbacks in Grenada and Suriname, we believe Guyana could become a more important operational base for Havana in the Caribbean Basin.⁴ For this reason, as well as to improve its damaged reputation as the hemispheric center for assistance and advice to like-minded revolutionaries, we believe Cuba might extend modest levels of material assistance and further expand its personnel and operations in Georgetown. Nonetheless, the poor relations between Burnham and Castro are likely to continue to hinder Cuban operations in the country. [redacted]

Cuba probably will continue to pursue the building-block approach elsewhere in the Caribbean Basin. In our view, however, Havana has little chance of establishing ties with conservative governments such as in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Belize over the near term. Recent strains in Havana's relations with Panama—over Central America and Cuban activities in Panama—undoubtedly worry Castro. [redacted] Panama's central location is important to Cuba for many of its overt [redacted]

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and covert operations aimed at Central America and western South America. Consequently, Havana is trying to strengthen its standing with Panama's military and is cultivating leaders of the civilian government to be inaugurated in October. Judging by a recent surge in high-level bilateral consultations, we believe Cuban leaders probably are making some headway. [redacted]

The Multilateral Picture

We judge that, because of its need to mobilize support for its position in Central America, Havana will continue to use international forums to foster closer contact with Latin American governments. Thus, Cuba probably will continue seeking to collaborate in Latin America's efforts to resolve its basic socioeconomic problems, while hoping to frustrate what it views as Washington's drive to isolate it. [redacted]

Similarly, we judge that Castro probably will persist at least throughout 1984 in trying to improve ties with Western Europe. Cuba probably expects to derive substantial political advantage as long as France, Spain, and Sweden, among others, continue to criticize Washington's policies on Central America and Cuba. We believe that Havana in its dealings with Latin America will continue trying to exploit the treatment by these West European countries of Cuba as a responsible interlocutor, particularly regarding the Central American crisis. Nonetheless, it seems unlikely that Castro will be able to make his long-sought European tour this year—given the hesitation of several capitals to offend Washington during an election year. [redacted]

Risky Alternative Paths

We recognize that several conceivable circumstances could lead Castro to change course abruptly and revert to "armed struggle" beyond Central America:

- Should a dramatic setback occur to Cuban interests in Central America—such as a near total defeat of the Salvadoran insurgents on the battlefield or indications that the Sandinista regime is tottering—a desperate Castro probably would want to respond by lashing out in any number of ways against the United States. This might involve instigating violence against US installations and individuals throughout Latin America and a sudden effort to foment insurgent activities and other political destabilization efforts on a wider scale in South America

and the Caribbean. Castro's ultimate intent probably would be to raise the cost to the United States of defeating Cuba's allies in Central America.

- An irresistible target of opportunity, from Havana's perspective, might appear on the political horizon. We believe that Chile would be the most tempting. In the unlikely event that political opposition and violence there escalate to the point where Castro judges that radical leftist groups—trained, supplied, and counseled by Cubans—could play a central part in ousting the Pinochet regime, Havana probably would not forgo the opportunity to play a direct role. Similarly, we believe that Castro might not resist the temptation to meddle if there were a military coup in Bolivia or if the internal situation in Jamaica, the Dominican Republic, or Colombia deteriorated sharply.

- Castro almost certainly would view a series of rejections by South American governments of Havana's overtures, particularly if they were accompanied by reversals of recent gains, as spelling failure of his diplomatic policy toward South America. He might be sufficiently irritated by these cumulative reverses to revert to "armed struggle" and other political destabilization activities aimed at several of them, especially, in our view, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, or the Dominican Republic. We believe that, rather than repeating the "scattergun" approach of the 1960s, he would selectively choose his targets so as not to spread his assets too thinly. We believe he would calculate that this approach would not seriously undermine Cuban efforts to sustain insurgency in Central America, although he probably would weigh carefully the risk of provoking direct US military counteraction, possibly aimed at Cuba itself. [redacted]

Implications for the United States

US pressure and other constraints on Castro have forced Cuba into a defensive posture. We believe Castro sees no realistic choice other than to continue seeking to improve bilateral relations as broadly as possible throughout the hemisphere and to curb his revolutionary proclivities for the time being. [redacted]

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Nevertheless, in our view, there will be adverse implications for current US policies in the region as a consequence of the more subtle inroads Cuba is likely to achieve. The upgrading of diplomatic ties with several countries already has somewhat lessened Cuba's isolation and undercut US efforts to persuade others that the Castro regime should still be treated as a pariah because of its intervention in Central America. Further gains in Havana's campaign may increase Latin American perceptions that US policies toward Cuba are losing effectiveness. []

Castro in his statesman's guise will continue to take every opportunity to undercut Washington's influence. He and his formidable propaganda apparatus, for example, are likely to interpret any new diplomatic breakthrough as a repudiation of US policies toward Cuba and, by extension, toward Central America. Similarly, Cuban representatives in these countries will use all forums and occasions they deem useful to denigrate the United States. []

We doubt that Cuba's impact in the region over the next few years will be greatly enhanced by the result of its ongoing campaign, which at most will amount to normalizing diplomatic ties with several additional countries, some trade expansion, and increased cultural and other exchanges. Although each country that opens or upgrades relations with Cuba adds a measure of respectability to the Castro regime and opportunities for an increased Cuban presence, Havana's regional influence will be circumscribed by remaining widespread skepticism about Cuban intentions. Even legitimate Cuban activities are likely to increase the anxieties of those military and conservative political sectors—and perhaps many moderates—that almost universally oppose relations with Havana. Moreover, considering the hostility toward Cuba on the part of Chile, Uruguay, Paraguay, most of the Caribbean, and probably Brazil at least over the near term, Cuba's diplomatic gains will fall considerably short of the hemispherewide success that Castro is seeking. []

In addition, we doubt that any expansion of Cuba's formal relations with its Latin American neighbors will significantly help Havana to play a leadership role in regional organizations to the detriment of Washington. Most governments, in our view, are unwilling to go beyond welcoming Cuba back into the inter-American fold. Nor are Latin American governments—which traditionally seek consensus rather

than following the lead of any country—likely to become more disposed to line up behind Havana in such multilateral forums as the United Nations. We believe that the Cubans themselves recognize this situation and will continue to view their recently intensified activities essentially as a means to further Cuba's bilateral relations with Latin America, rather than constituting a major drive to rejoin the inter-American system in a leadership capacity. []

Finally, any general improvement in Cuba's relations with South America, and perhaps some Caribbean countries, would probably be perceived in Moscow as benefiting Soviet interests in at least two contexts. For one, the resultant blow to US influence would complement Soviet global interests in seeing the United States lose stature worldwide. Moscow also would welcome Cuba's success in overcoming its hemispheric isolation, especially following Grenada and at a time of heightened international tension over Central America. Moreover, Moscow probably would view increased receptivity to Havana, particularly in South America, as indicative of a lessening of the suspicion that Havana is a Soviet surrogate and thus helpful in furthering Moscow's own substantial trade and diplomatic ties with several South American countries. []

By the same token, we believe that the Soviets would oppose any Cuban decision to resume large-scale "armed struggle" tactics, especially in South America, because of the importance of Soviet commercial and political interests in the region. Moscow probably would calculate that the Soviet Union and the pro-Moscow Communist parties in the region would be blamed along with Cuba. If Havana were to attempt to promote insurgency widely in South America, either in reaction to setbacks to its Central American allies or because its diplomatic gains in South America were reversed, we believe Moscow probably would seek to restrain Havana by threatening to withhold its vital economic support, as it did in the late 1960s. If Havana were to increase assistance to individual rebel groups whose fortunes appeared clearly promising, however, Castro would run significantly less risk of a negative Soviet reaction and Moscow's posture would be decided on a case-by-case basis. []

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